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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

268th meeting

Tuesday, 28 March 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Rowe ..... (Sierra Leone)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairman: I declare open the 2006 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission has been convened today for a brief session to deal with organizational matters, including the election of the Chairman and of other members of the Bureau for 2006 and the adoption of a draft provisional agenda for the next substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

With regard to the election of the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission, I understand that intensive consultations are being conducted with the various regional groups. We hope that very soon we will be in a position to present candidates to the Commission for its approval. We note that those consultations are ongoing, but I would like to remind delegations that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 52/492 of 8 September 1998, the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies are to be elected for the full three-year cycle of the Commission. That, in turn, underlines the responsibility involved in chairing the groups. It will require some degree of commitment on the part of the future chairpersons. We have succeeded in having an agenda. We should not miss this opportunity to get into substantive work. The only way in which we can demonstrate our determination to engage in substantive work is to have the two subsidiary bodies fully constituted and their chairpersons named, so that we can start working in earnest.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chairman: I wish now to draw the Committee's attention to the agenda for this organizational session, which is published in today's *Journal*. Are there any comments? If I hear none, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the agenda.

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chairman

The Chairman: In accordance with the established practice of rotation, it is the Group of Asian States that has the honour to nominate the candidate for the post of Chairman of the Commission for its 2006 substantive session. I have received a note from the Chairman of that Group informing me that the Group has endorsed a candidate.

It is my pleasure to give the floor to the representative of Kuwait to present to the Commission the candidate for the post of the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2006 session.

Mr. Al-Najem (Kuwait): Mr. Chairman, I have the honour to inform you that the Asian Group has endorsed Ambassador Oh Joon of the Republic of Korea for the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission.

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The Chairman: I thank the representative of Kuwait for his statement and for the nomination of Ambassador Oh Joon, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, to the post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect Ambassador Oh Joon of the Republic of Korea to the chairmanship of the Commission for its 2006 substantive session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: On behalf of the Commission and on my own behalf, I congratulate Ambassador Oh Joon on his election to this very high office and to express the commonly shared view that we are looking forward to benefiting from his wide experience and diplomatic skills. We wish him success in discharging his newly assumed important duties. I think he faces an onerous task. However, in my view, he also has the capacity and the experience to ensure that we make good use of the Commission. He has the determination to underscore the efficacy of the Commission, which remains one of the most effective multilateral machineries for disarmament and non-proliferation.

I now invite Ambassador Oh Joon to assume the chairmanship.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea) took the Chair.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the members of the Commission for having elected me Chairman of the Disarmament Commission and for the important task entrusted to me in chairing this organizational session. I consider this an acknowledgement of my country's contribution to the important cause of international security and disarmament. I also want to thank the previous Chairman for the kind words and good wishes addressed to me. Although I am not sure if I have the capacity he mentioned, I am counting on the support and cooperation of all Member States in achieving the Commission's important goals.

Before turning to the next item on our agenda, allow me to pay a well-deserved tribute to my predecessor, Ambassador Sylvester Rowe, for the guidance and leadership he provided to the Commission. My gratitude also goes to other members of the Bureau for their valiant and tireless efforts during the previous session. Finally, let me thank delegations for their constructive spirit and cooperation during the Commission's deliberations last year, which resulted in agreement on three substantive items on the agenda.

Of course, it is a disappointment for all of us that it was not possible to hold substantive sessions of the Commission during the last two years. It is not an easy task to try to reach a perfect balance of interests on issues as important as disarmament and security and on ways and means to achieve them. While introducing the draft resolution in the First Committee, Ambassador Rowe, the Chairman of the Commission in 2005, spoke about this problem.

As we move on from the difficulties we have had in the past, today I invite the Commission to look at the future. Let me make a few general observations about the future as I see it. The 2006 international disarmament calendar is rich with events. The outside world — the community of nations — expects a lot from those events. These general expectations are rooted in a number of factors. Let me briefly draw the attention of the Commission to some of them.

First of all, despite the fact that the last two years have not been the easiest or most productive years for the international multilateral disarmament machinery, we still believe that the present international climate not only calls for urgent measures but also allows for a wide variety of undertakings in the field of disarmament. The international disarmament community has had its share of disappointments in recent years, but it also has had positive achievements of which to be rightfully proud. We all share a vision of a more secure and peaceful world, and we have the resolve to work towards its realization.

Secondly, the inability of the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission to achieve tangible results has contributed to a heightened sense of urgency on the part of the international community to reform and revitalize disarmament machinery in such a way that it can start adequately to react and respond to emerging threats to global peace and security. That new element adds to the already existing heavy responsibility which we bear collectively and individually. What happens within these walls is not an isolated event. It is an integral part

of global disarmament efforts at all levels, governmental or non-governmental.

Thirdly, the emergence of new kinds of threats and the fact that they have rapidly been thrust to the forefront of our security concerns, and the need to deal with them without further delay, have created a new atmosphere of greater expectations among politicians, disarmament professionals, non-governmental organizations, the academic community and civil society — in other words, among the general public at large.

We hope that this overall atmosphere of expectation will positively influence the work of the Disarmament Commission in 2006. Here I should like to refer to the broad-based support for the Disarmament Commission expressed during the session of the First Committee by practically all delegations. Even the criticism levelled at the Commission was of a constructive nature. Delegations pointed to shortcomings and spoke in a businesslike manner about ways and means to make the Commission's work more relevant and responsive to immediate security challenges. Our approach to the prospects of the Disarmament Commission in 2006 is based on that support and expressed good will.

Election of other officers

The Chairman: We shall now proceed to the election of other officers of the Disarmament Commission for 2006. In that connection, I now call on the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Galbavý (Slovakia): I have the honour to inform the Commission that the Group of Eastern European States has endorsed Mr. Jacek Januchowski of the Republic of Poland and Mr. Sergei Rachkov of the Republic of Belarus for the two posts of Vice-Chairperson of the Commission allocated to the Group.

The Chairman: I now call on the representative of Finland.

Mr. Taalas (Finland): I wish to confirm to the Commission that the Group of Western European and other States, at its meeting yesterday, endorsed the candidatures of Austria and Israel for the post of Vice-Chairperson of the Commission. We will be providing the names of the candidates in due course.

The Chairman: The following countries have thus far been nominated by their respective regional groups for posts of Vice-Chairpersons of the Commission: the Group of Eastern European States has endorsed the candidacies of Belarus and Poland, and the Group of Western European and other States has endorsed the candidacies of Austria and Israel.

If I hear no comment, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect by acclamation the representatives of Austria, Belarus, Israel and Poland as Vice-Chairpersons of the Commission for the 2006 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Allow me, on behalf of the Commission, to warmly congratulate the elected officers and to wish them success in discharging their duties. I look forward to working with them and count on their counsel.

As I understand, and as pointed out earlier by Ambassador Rowe, consultations are still being carried out within the regional groups on the remaining Vice-Chairperson positions and on the position of Rapporteur. Therefore, I would suggest that those elections be taken up at a later stage.

Review of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its sixtieth session relating to the Disarmament Commission

The Chairman: As members of the Commission are aware, the First Committee recommended for adoption by the General Assembly one draft resolution which had specific bearing on the work of the Commission. It was subsequently adopted by the Assembly as resolution 60/91. For the sake of clarity, and for the benefit of members of the Commission, I would like to refer to that resolution.

Resolution 60/91, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", was adopted by the General Assembly on 8 December 2005 under agenda item 99 (d). The relevant paragraphs of the draft resolution, namely operative paragraphs 5 and 6, read as follows:

> "Welcomes the efforts made by the Disarmament Commission during its organizational meeting in July 2005 towards achieving its objectives, and recommends that the Commission intensify consultations on those efforts with a view to reaching definitive

agreements before the start of its substantive session in 2006;

"Requests the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2006, from 10 to 28 April, and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session".

I am happy to report that the recommendations contained in operative paragraph 5 were fully met and that, over the period of the next three years, the Commission will be taking up two very interesting and topical items: "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons" and "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons". As members are aware, the Commission also agreed, at its 267th meeting, on 12 December 2005, that the issue of measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Disarmament Commission would be considered in plenary meeting during the 2006 substantive session, with equitable time allocated to it.

Every three years, the Commission and its members are confronted with the problem of choosing substantive items for ensuing discussions. On previous occasions, the Commission has each time had to overcome seemingly intractable differences, but has eventually agreed on topics worthy of our focused attention. More often than not, compromise has come through a prolonged and painful negotiating process. I think the process of reaching agreement on the draft provisional agenda we have this year was particularly difficult. Once again, I want to thank Ambassador Rowe and delegations for their concentrated and courageous efforts in laying the groundwork for us.

Draft provisional agenda for the 2006 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission (A/CN.10/L.57)

The Chairman: As there are no comments, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the draft provisional agenda for the 2006 substantive session as contained in document A/CN.10/L.57.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: The Commission is also invited to take note of the Commission's general programme of work (A/CN.10/2006/CRP.1), containing detailed information about the distribution of our future work.

Organizational matters

The Chairman: While we are considering the provisional agenda for the 2006 substantive session, let us also address the establishment of the working groups to deal with the two substantive agenda items, with the third item being addressed within plenary meetings, as agreed.

I suggest that we re-establish Working Groups I and II to deal with the two substantive items, on nuclear and conventional issues, respectively. Moreover, as in previous years, we have to establish the Committee of the Whole to deal with other substantive and organizational matters.

If there are no comments, I will take it that the Commission wishes to establish those three bodies.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I should like to note that, according to established practice, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. Unfortunately, as I have already informed the Commission, we are not in a position today to deal with the appointment of chairpersons for the two subsidiary bodies, since the regional groups still have to agree on and present their candidates for those important posts.

Moreover, there are several other issues which we have left pending at this stage, namely, the nomination of candidates for the remaining posts of Vice-Chairpersons and Rapporteur. As I have said, this process will require more time to be finalized. Accordingly, it may be advisable for the Commission to suspend consideration of these matters for now so that the delegations can carry out further consultations.

I call on the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Sérgio de Queiroz Duarte (Brazil): Mr. Chairman, let me, on behalf of the Brazilian delegation, congratulate you on your election and pledge our full support to you, and to the other officers who have been elected, in your endeavours.

With regard to the appointment of coordinators for the Commission's two working groups, I am pleased to announce that the Brazilian delegation is in

a position to offer to continue to coordinate the work of Working Group II, on the item entitled "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons".

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Brazil for his delegation's willingness to take up the position of Chairman of Working Group II. If I hear no other comment, may I take it that the Commission decides to elect the representative of Brazil as Chairman of Working Group II?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: If there are no other comments on this organizational issue, I will take it that it is the wish of the Disarmament Commission to suspend the consideration of unresolved issues at this organizational session and to return to them at the beginning of the substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I encourage regional groups to proceed with their consultations on an urgent basis and to submit their remaining nominations as quickly as possible.

I would also like to inform members that I intend to hold informal consultations of the whole to discuss the work of the Commission for the substantive session before the beginning of the session on the afternoon of Monday, 3 April, at 3 p.m. in Conference Room 4. The purpose of the informal consultations will be to share our views on what we can expect to achieve at the upcoming session and on how we should proceed in dealing with the three substantive items on the agenda. As we all know, the Commission has not been able to have a substantive meeting for the last two years. Having been elected Chairman only this morning, I do not have enough time to consult member States in the runup to the beginning of the session the week after next.

Under the circumstances, we would be naïve if we set an overly ambitious goal for this session. But, at the same time, the fact that we have agreed on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission after two years' deadlock, might indicate willingness and readiness on the part of all Member States to at least come back to the table to grapple with the substantive issues and make efforts to narrow the gap in our views on them. Therefore, I sincerely believe that we should not miss this opportunity to pool our wisdom in order to move our talks forward in a constructive and practical manner.

In order to provide a basis for the informal consultations next week, I will circulate a short non-paper of the Chair later this week on conducting the business of the substantive session. In this regard, I would of course appreciate input or feedback from any member at any time in the process.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.